

National Register of Historic Places FACT SHEET



The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's official list of properties recognized for their significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture. The National Register Program was established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect our historic and archeological resources. National Register properties include districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects. They can be significant to a local community, a state, an Indian tribe, or the nation as a whole.

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) is the Commonwealth's official history agency. The PHMC's Bureau for Historic Preservation (BHP) maintains the Commonwealth's inventory of historic properties and prehistoric sites and manages the National Register of Historic Places in Pennsylvania.

National Register properties are distinguished by having been documented and evaluated according to uniform standards. These criteria recognize the accomplishments of all peoples who have contributed to the history and heritage of the United States and are designed to help state and local governments, federal agencies, and others identify important historic and archeological properties worthy of preservation and of consideration in planning and development decisions. Listing in the National Register, however, does not interfere with a private property owner's right to alter, manage, or dispose of property. It often changes the way communities perceive their historic resources and gives credibility to efforts to preserve these resources as irreplaceable parts of our communities.

Listing in the National Register contributes to preserving historic properties in a number of ways:

1. recognition that a property is of significance to the nation, the state, or local community;
2. eligibility for federal tax incentives for income-producing buildings;
3. state and federal preservation grants for planning and rehabilitation of buildings owned by not-for-profit organizations and local governments;
4. consideration in the planning for state and federal projects or projects that are assisted by state or federal agencies.

The National Register Process in Pennsylvania

In Pennsylvania, properties are nominated to the National Register by the Bureau for Historic Preservation. BHP's role in this process is review and advisory in nature. BHP reviews submitted nominations to determine whether they meet the criteria for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places; conducts site visits to proposed historic districts; reviews adequacy of documentation; and assures that the procedures and standards of the National Register program are met. The steps in the National Register process are as follows:

1. **Historic Resource Survey Form (HRSF):** BHP receives descriptive and historical information on buildings, structures, objects, sites, and districts on the HRSF.
2. **Eligibility:** Completed HRSF are reviewed by a committee of BHP staff (using National Register criteria) to determine if properties are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
3. **Nomination:** If eligible, the owner may proceed with formally nominating the property to the National Register using the National Park Service registration form.
4. **State Review Board:** Completed nominations are submitted to the Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Board. The Board will typically meet two or three times a year. The Board reviews the nomination, designating whether or not it meets the criteria for evaluation and its level of significance prior to its submittal to the National Park Service.
5. **National Park Service:** Approves nominations that are sent to it for listing in the National Register.

National Register Criteria

To be eligible for listing in the National Register, a property must meet the National Register Criteria for Evaluation. These criteria require that a property be old enough to be considered historic (generally at least 50 years old) and that it still look much the same way as it was in the past. In addition, the property must:

- A. be associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represent the work of a master, or possess high artistic values, or represent a significant a distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. have yielded or may be likely to yield information important in history or prehistory.

Typically, cemeteries, birthplaces, graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties less than 50 years old are not considered eligible for the National Register. However, such properties will qualify if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they meet special criteria.

The National Register Does...

- 1. honor a historic property by recognizing its important to its local community, state, or the nation;
- 2. encourage the preservation of historic properties by documenting their significance;
- 3. list properties only if they meet the National Register criteria for evaluation;
- 4. facilitate the review of federally funded, licensed, or permitted projects to determine their effects on historic properties;
- 5. provide an opportunity to consult with government agencies to mitigate projects that will adversely affect historic properties;
- 6. provide information about historic resources for planning purposes;
- 7. offer federal tax benefits to owners of income-producing (depreciable) historic properties if they rehabilitate their properties according to preservation standards.

The National Register Does Not...

- 1. provide a marker or plaque for registered properties (property owners may obtain markers or plaques at their own expense);
- 2. restrict the rights of property owners;
- 3. require that properties be maintained, repaired, or restored;
- 4. prevent a resource's destruction by federal, state, local, or private development;
- 5. guarantee that grant funds will be available for projects;
- 6. require property owners to follow preservation standards on their properties unless they wish to qualify for tax benefits;
- 7. require property owners to allow public access to their property;
- 8. automatically invoke local historic district zoning or landmark designation;
- 9. list individual properties if the owner objects, or list a historic district if the majority of property owners objects.

National Register listing does not place obligations on private property owners, nor does it place restrictions on the use, treatment, or disposition of private property. National Register listing does not lead to public acquisition of property, nor does it require public access to property.